the mans Decree: Kai Ping / Chen Ping

Chapter 6761 - 6770

Countless islands float on the sea, like emerald fragments scattered on blue silk.

Some islands are only a few feet square, with a solitary, unnamed spirit tree growing on them, its crown swaying gently in the wind;

others are as large as a city, with mountains, rivers, and buildings, and the figures of cultivators can be vaguely seen flying and moving among them.

Spirit boats of various shapes travel between the islands; some are like light leaves, gliding swiftly across the water;

others are like enormous ships, their hulls covered with intricate runes that shimmer with various colors in the sunlight.

But the most awe-inspiring sights are the enormous, slowly moving shadows deep within the Void Sea.

These shadows, like moving mountain ranges, traverse hundreds of feet of water.

Occasionally, a massive tail will break the surface, creating waves hundreds of feet high, the spray exploding into countless crystalline droplets in the sunlight, like a sudden downpour.

“This…is this the Void Sea?”

Xuan Zhenzi’s voice trembled slightly. “I’ve lived for tens of thousands of years, and this is the first time I’ve seen such a vast sea…and how come this seawater is spiritual liquid? It’s all spiritual liquid?”

He crouched down and reached into the water.

The clear liquid flowed in his palm, radiating a dense, almost solidified spiritual energy.

His eyes widened even more: “Good heavens…can you drink this water directly? The spiritual energy is purer than top-grade spirit crystals!”

Jiang Xuelan stood beside Kai, her icy blue eyes reflecting the entire azure ocean and the flowing light across the sky.

Her long hair was blown by the sea breeze, shimmering with a silvery-white luster in the sunlight.

She didn’t speak, but the corners of her mouth curved slightly.

Kai’s gaze swept over the densely packed islands on the sea, then looked at the constantly darting streams of light in the sky.

Those were cultivators flying, some traveling alone on swords, some in groups of three or five riding on spirit boats, and some riding enormous sea beasts cutting through the waves.

The bustling atmosphere of the Void Sea far exceeded his expectations; the flow of people here was more than a hundred times greater than in the Netherworld Abyss.

“Let’s find an island to settle on first,”

Kai said. “We need to understand the situation in the Void Sea and also inquire about the aquatic tribes.”

Xuan Zhenzi stood up, shaking off the spiritual liquid on his hands. “Which way? There are so many islands in this sea, it’s making my eyes blurry.”

Kai’s gaze fell on a medium-sized, seemingly quite prosperous island in the distance.

On that island stood a tall tower, a bright spiritual lamp shining from its top, clearly visible even in the sunlight, obviously used as a lighthouse.

Many spirit boats were moored around the island, and cultivators frequently entered and exited in the air, suggesting it was a convenient transportation hub and a center for information exchange.

“That island,” Kai pointed.

The three of them simultaneously took flight, soaring towards the island.

The Void Sea spread out beneath them, like a flowing sapphire.

The seawater was crystal clear, revealing underwater mountains, canyons, and lush aquatic plants. Occasionally, a school of spirit fish shimmering with silver light could be seen swimming by, like a flowing galaxy.

After flying for about fifteen minutes, they landed on the edge of the island. The

island’s ground was paved with a pale blue rock, warm to the touch and subtly elastic underfoot.

Dozens of spirit boats were moored at the dock, with cultivators loading and unloading cargo, merchants hawking their wares, and children playing in the water—a bustling and vibrant scene.

The island’s buildings were mostly constructed of white stone and blue glazed tiles, a stark contrast to the dark and somber atmosphere of the Netherworld Abyss, exuding brightness and openness.

Shops lining the streets were filled with various marine spiritual materials—fist-sized pearls, fluorescent corals, and dried sea animal hides that still radiated spiritual energy.

Kai led the two into a rather clean-looking teahouse.

The teahouse wasn't large, but it was quite busy. Groups of two or three sat by the windows, some conversing quietly, others gazing blankly at the sea view.

Kai ordered a pot of local Sea Spirit Tea, and the three of them sat in a corner, listening intently to the conversations around them.

Most of the conversations were between cultivators exchanging cultivation insights, haggling over the prices of spiritual materials, and discussing anecdotes about the various islands in the Void Sea.

But as Kai listened more closely, he caught a word—"aquatic creatures."

Two cultivators at the next table were talking in hushed tones, their voices so low that if it weren't for Kai's Chaos Power's keen perception of his surroundings, he wouldn't have been able to hear a thing.

"Have you heard? Things haven't been peaceful with the aquatic tribes lately."

"What happened? Aren't they always been peaceful and detached from worldly affairs?"

"Peaceful and detached, that's true, but I heard that many polluted sea beasts have recently appeared on the outskirts of their territory. Those sea beasts have a black aura within them, as if they've been corrupted by something."

"A black aura? What aura?"

"I don't know. The aquatic tribes have blocked the news, but some people saw them sending out many patrols. It's said… it seems to be related to the Netherworld Abyss."

Kai's brow twitched slightly.

The Netherworld Abyss.

He picked up his teacup, gently blowing away the steam from his face, his gaze subtly sweeping over the two cultivators at the next table.

Their cultivation was around the ninth rank of the Golden Immortal realm, and they were simply dressed, appearing to be rogue cultivators who made their living at sea year-round.

He put down his teacup, stood up, walked to the next table, and cupped his hands in greeting: “Fellow Daoists, excuse me. I’ve only recently arrived in the Void Sea, and I overheard you two mentioning the aquatic race… Could you elaborate?”

The two cultivators looked up at Kai, then at Jiang Xuelan and Xuan Zhenzi behind him, their auras concealed, a hint of wariness flashing in their eyes.

One of the older cultivators spoke up: “Why are you inquiring about the aquatic race?”

Kai smiled: “To be honest, I have a power within me that I cannot refine, and a senior said that this power is related to the aquatic race. So I’d like to learn about their situation.”

The two cultivators exchanged a glance, seemingly lowering their guard somewhat.

The older cultivator said: “We don’t know much about the aquatic race either. They live deep within the Void Sea, about two days’ journey from here.

That area of water is protected by a barrier, and outsiders generally cannot enter.”

“What about the polluted fish?” Kai pressed.

“This…” another cultivator shook his head, “Nobody knows. It’s just that recently, cultivators have often seen dead sea beasts floating up in the depths of the Void Sea. There is a black aura inside those sea beasts, and

cultivators who come into contact with them will feel a stinging pain in their souls."

"The aquatic tribe sent out patrols, but it seems they haven't found anything."

Kai nodded. "Thank you both."

He returned to his seat, and Jiang Xuelan's gaze fell on his face. "Any clues?"

"Sea beasts corrupted by a black aura have appeared near the aquatic tribe's territory,"

Kai said in a low voice. "That black aura… is very likely related to the demonic soul deep within the rift."

Xuan Zhenzi's brows furrowed. "You mean… the power of that demonic soul has already infiltrated the Void Sea?"

"Not sure,"

Kai said. "But the rift in the Netherworld Abyss is only separated from the Void Sea by an underground river. If the power of the demonic soul can spread to the Void Sea through the river, then the appearance of corrupted sea beasts in the aquatic tribe's territory makes sense."

He put down his teacup, his purple eyes gazing at the boundless blue ocean outside the window. The commotion in the teahouse was abruptly interrupted by the commotion outside.

At first, there were only a few scattered exclamations, like ripples on water.

But soon, the exclamations turned into shouts, footsteps, and the buzzing of spiritual energy runes as the spirit boat started moving.

Someone rushed in from outside, yelling, “Something’s happened! Something’s happened! Someone on Azure Wave Island has captured a member of the aquatic race!”

The entire teahouse fell silent for a moment, then erupted into chaos like a pot of boiling water with its lid lifted.

“An aquatic race?!”

“Really? How could an aquatic race be captured?”

“Who’s so bold? Aren’t there restrictions on the aquatic race’s territory?”

“Never mind that! Go see! We’ve never seen an aquatic race before!”

The cultivators threw down their teacups; some jumped out of the windows, some rushed to the dock, and some had already taken to the sky on their swords.

The once quiet island instantly became noisy and chaotic.

Kai watched the crowd surging towards the dock like a tide, a hint of surprise flashing in his purple eyes.

He had originally assumed that the aquatic race lived in the Void Sea and that the people here should see them often, but the reaction of these people to the word “aquatic race” was as if they had heard of some legendary rare species.

He stopped a young cultivator who was rushing past him, his tone calm yet carrying just the right amount of curiosity: “Fellow Daoist, aren’t the aquatic race in the Void Sea? Why is everyone so curious?”

The young cultivator was initially a little impatient at being stopped, but when he saw Kai’s purple eyes, he involuntarily stopped: “You’re from out of town, aren’t you?”

“I just arrived recently,” Kai nodded.

“No wonder,”

the young cultivator explained. “Although the aquatic race lives deep within the Void Sea, they have their own territory and never interact with the outside world.

We cultivators, when hunting sea beasts and gathering spiritual materials, always deliberately avoid their area. For tens of thousands of years, no one has ever heard of anyone seeing what the aquatic race looks like.

Occasionally, fishermen say they’ve seen blurry figures in the deep sea, but these are just legends. This time, someone on Azure Wave Island actually captured an aquatic race member alive. Can you imagine how curious everyone is?”

With that, he hurriedly ran towards the dock, afraid of missing this spectacle.

Kai stood there, his purple eyes gleaming with thoughtful reflection.

The aquatic race had been isolated from the world for tens of thousands of years, never contacting the outside world. Even if someone had seen them, it was only through vague legends. For

such a race to suddenly have a member captured alive—this in itself was highly unusual.

What concerned him even more was that sea beasts corrupted by demonic power had just appeared near the aquatic race’s territory, and then someone captured an aquatic race member. Could there be a connection between these two events?

“Let’s go,” Kai said to Jiang Xuelan and Xuanzhenzi. “Let’s go take a look too.”

Xuanzhenzi looked at the dense crowd on the dock and the constantly departing spirit boats, and scratched his head: “With so many people, there aren’t enough spirit boats. How are we going to get there?”

“Pay up the money,” Kai said. “There will always be someone willing to take us.”

Sure enough, there were several spirit boats soliciting passengers by the dock, and the boat owners were shouting loudly: “Azure Wave Island! Azure Wave Island! Fifty high-grade spirit crystals per person! Direct! No detours!”

Although the price was high, there were still quite a few people willing to pay.

Kai paid one hundred and fifty high-grade spirit crystals, and the three of them boarded a medium-sized spirit boat.

There were already more than a dozen people standing on the deck of the spirit boat, all craning their necks to look ahead, their faces full of anticipation and curiosity.

The moment the spirit boat started, the blue runes on the hull lit up, and the entire boat shot into the sea like an arrow.

The spirit liquid was split open at the bow, turning into two high sprays that splashed to both sides.

On the surrounding sea, countless spirit boats, like a school of fish startled, sped towards the same direction, their dense silhouettes shimmering with various colors in the sunlight.

A sea breeze swept across them, carrying a salty, damp scent.

Jiang Xuelan stood beside Kai, her icy blue eyes fixed on the approaching outline of the massive island ahead: “Do you think this is related to the pollution?”

“Not sure,”

Kai said, “but the timing is too coincidental. Sea beasts corrupted by demonic power just appeared in the aquatic territory, and then an aquatic was captured. If it’s a coincidence, it’s too much of a coincidence.”

Xuan Zhenzi stood beside them, his hands braced against the gunwale: “Besides, the aquatic race hasn’t shown themselves for tens of thousands of years, how come they were caught at this particular time? I think there’s definitely something fishy going on behind this.”

The spirit boat cleaved through the waves, and after about half an hour, a massive island appeared ahead.

The island resembled a piece of land floating on the sea. In the distance, one could see continuous mountain ranges and dense forests, with buildings scattered at the foot of the mountains and along the coast.

The island’s port was several times larger than the island Kai had visited before, with dozens of spirit boats coming and going. The dock was bustling with people, resembling a lively market.

Azure Wave Island.

After the spirit boat docked, Kai and his companions followed the flow of people onto the dock.

The streets on the island were wider than on the previous island, and the buildings were more imposing, suggesting it was a crucial hub island in the Void Sea.

However, everyone’s attention was not on the buildings or streetscape, but rather on a plaza in the center of the island.

“Hurry, hurry! I heard that aquatic person is tied up in the plaza!”

“What does he look like? Is he like us? Does he have legs?”

“I heard he has blue skin! And scales!”

“Scales? Isn’t that a monster?”

“Don’t talk nonsense! The aquatic race is a legitimate race, different from the demon race!”

Discussions, speculations, and exclamations mingled together, forming a buzzing wave of sound.

Kai moved forward with the crowd, passing through several streets until a wide plaza appeared ahead.

In the center of the plaza stood a black stone pillar, upon which was bound a slender figure.

The plaza was packed with onlookers, several layers deep, some even flying into the air to get a better view.

Kai, along with Jiang Xuelan and Xuan Zhenzi, squeezed to a relatively close position and finally saw the figure on the pillar clearly.

It was a very young-looking aquatic woman, about seventeen or eighteen years old.

Her skin was like seawater under moonlight, shimmering with a faint icy blue sheen.

Her hair was deep blue, like the dark ocean, now loosely draped over her shoulders, the ends glistening with tiny water droplets.

Her features were delicate and refined, possessing an ethereal quality unlike that of humans or gods, as if formed from the very ocean itself.

She wore a peculiarly styled robe, its material unknown, shimmering like fish scales in the sunlight.

Her hands were tightly bound to a stone pillar with black ropes inscribed with intricate runes, clearly a restraining cord specifically designed to bind the power of aquatic creatures.

Similar ropes bound her ankles, rendering her immobile.

Her lips were pressed tightly together, and her deep blue eyes, like those of the ocean, held no tears, no fear, only a cold, frozen anger and stubbornness.

She remained silent, neither begging nor struggling, simply standing there quietly, like a lone fish washed ashore on a reef by the waves.

“Is this the Water Tribe?” someone in the crowd exclaimed in a low voice. “They really do look similar to us… just with different skin tones.”

“Look at her eyes! That blue is so deep, like seawater.”

“She looks so frail, is she really that powerful? Aren’t the Water Tribe supposed to be proficient in water-based laws?”

“Bound like that, even if she’s powerful, she can’t move.”

Whispers rose and fell.

The Water Tribe woman remained silent, neither speaking nor bowing her head, simply staring straight ahead, her gaze piercing through the crowd and landing on a distant, unnoticed corner.

Kai looked into her eyes, a complex light flashing in his purple pupils.

He saw something familiar in her eyes—the helplessness of being trapped, the stubbornness of not yielding, the persistence of waiting for some hope.

He turned to look at the surrounding crowd, his gaze sweeping over the curiosity, excitement, and indifference on the faces of the onlookers, before settling on a high platform at the edge of the square.

Several people sat on the platform, judging from their attire, they were likely the leaders of the island.

One of them, a middle-aged man in fine clothes…

Xuanzhenzi nodded, then turned to investigate.

Kai’s gaze fell on the aquatic girl, and the aquatic power deep within his dantian, which he had never been able to refine, suddenly throbbed violently.

The throbbing was extremely intense, like a heart that had slumbered for millennia suddenly awakening, carrying an unusual resonance that spread upwards along his meridians, striking a dull rhythm in his chest.

Kai’s body stiffened slightly.

That power had never reacted so violently within him before; normally, it quietly resided in a corner of his dantian, like a stone sunk in deep water.

But now, it seemed to have been awakened by something invisible, trembling wildly, like a fish trapped in a net desperately struggling to escape.

The tremor transmitted through his meridians, making his limbs feel numb.

At the same time, the aquatic girl on the stone pillar’s pupils suddenly contracted.

Her deep blue eyes abruptly turned towards Kai, piercing through the layers of people and the clamor of voices, landing precisely on him.

Her lips parted slightly, her breath catching in her throat, as if she had forgotten the existence of air for a moment.

She stared at him for a long time, her eyes, which had been filled with anger and stubbornness, now swirling with surprise, confusion, and some complex emotion she herself couldn't describe.

Like a pebble thrown into a calm, deep lake, ripples spread out in concentric circles.

She was a water spirit, naturally possessing an extremely strong perception of forces of the same origin.

She couldn't be mistaken—it was a pure, ancient water spirit aura, though it was enveloped and diluted by some powerful gray force, its origin was unmistakable.

Yet that aura was appearing on a human cultivator, leaving her utterly perplexed.

Kai could feel the resonance gradually weakening, like a sudden tsunami finally subsiding.

But he knew that the girl must have sensed something as well.

He suppressed the turmoil in his heart and didn't immediately step forward.

Now was not the right time to recognize each other; there were too many onlookers, too many eyes and ears around.

At this moment, Xuanzhenzi squeezed back through the crowd, his expression complex, tinged with the embarrassment of being jostled.

He leaned close to Kai's ear, his voice low and hushed, mingling with the sea breeze and the surrounding clamor: "I've found out. This aquatic girl was chasing a polluted sea beast in the outer waters when she was discovered by hunters from Bibo Island.

The sea beast was injured, its body shrouded in black aura, and it fled to the shallow waters near the island.

The girl chased after it, only to be caught by the hunters who were prepared, using a specially designed net to suppress aquatic creatures.

It's said that the net is woven from deep-sea black iron and some kind of restrictive runes, suppressing the aquatic creatures' spiritual power to the point of near impairment.

As for why they captured her… nobody knows. The people on the island are very tight-lipped; even old acquaintances who drink tea with me won't utter a word.

I've tried several people, and as soon as I mentioned it, they shut up and left."

Xuanzhenzi's words made Kai's brows furrow even more.

The restrictive net specifically designed to subdue aquatic creatures indicates that the capture was premeditated, not a spur-of-the-moment decision.

Even cultivators who spend their lives at sea are unaware of the reason, suggesting the mastermind behind it has maintained an extremely tight security net.

Kai's gaze returned to the girl.

Her expression was growing increasingly pained—fine beads of sweat trickled down her icy blue forehead, dripping onto her blue and white robes, leaving dark stains.

Her lips were tightly pressed together, already pale, and her body trembled slightly. The trembling was initially subtle, like a candle flame flickering in the wind,

then became more pronounced, extending from her shoulders to her arms, trembling incessantly along her tightly bound fingertips.

The pain wasn't from external injuries, but from the relentless suppression of aquatic creatures outside the waters by the laws of the celestial realm.

She could feel her spiritual energy constantly draining away, her life force rapidly slipping through her fingers like grains of sand; with each passing moment, her vitality dimmed further.

She could hear her heartbeat gradually slowing, and felt the scent of the sea growing ever more distant.

It was as if a receding tide was carrying away all her strength.

If this continued, she wouldn't last half an hour.

Meanwhile, the elegantly dressed man remained seated on the high platform, leisurely sipping a cup of emerald-green spiritual tea, seemingly oblivious to everything.

His gaze occasionally swept over the girl, but it was as if he were looking at merchandise in a shop, devoid of any emotional fluctuation.

Beside him sat several cultivators in fine robes, each with a steady aura and cultivation level above the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm—clearly the core strength of Azure Wave Island.

Kai's brows furrowed deeper and deeper.

He couldn't help but take a step forward, gray chaotic power condensing in his palm, transforming into a layer of warm light, which he gently pushed towards the girl.

The power wasn't strong, but it carried the primal attributes of chaotic power, temporarily isolating her from the suppression of some celestial laws, giving her some breathing room.

The gray light, like a thin mist, drifted silently towards the girl.

But just as the gray light approached the stone pillar, a golden palm strike slammed down from the platform, precisely scattering the gray light in mid-air.

The man in fine clothes put down his teacup, slowly stood up, and his golden gaze, like two sharp swords, fell on Kai.

Then, with an undeniable air of authority, he said, “Young man, I advise you not to meddle in other people’s business.”

Kai met his gaze: “She’s about to die. If we don’t help her block the suppression of the laws, she won’t last half an hour.”

“That’s her business.”

The man in fine clothes’ voice remained calm, even carrying a hint of a smile, as if Kai’s words were just a child’s naive question. “You, an outsider cultivator, would be better off staying put and watching the show. Some troubled waters are not for you to wade into.”

The moment the two confronted each other, the surrounding discussions quieted down for a moment, and the gazes that had been focused on the water girl turned to Kai.

Some whispered, some pointed, but they quickly turned their attention back to the stone pillar.

Kai remained silent for a moment before withdrawing his hand.

He could indeed sense that the man in the fine clothes possessed unfathomable cultivation, at least at the second rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal.

Making a rash move before the man had revealed all his trump cards would only worsen the situation.

He retreated back into the crowd, but his fingers never left the hilt of the Dragon-Slaying Sword.

The girl's breathing became increasingly rapid, her body slightly curled up, she was almost... The sea changed.

In the distance, at the edge of the Void Sea, the once calm, mirror-like surface of the water suddenly surged.

This surge was unlike ordinary tides; it was a deeper, more violent force, as if surging upwards from the deepest depths of the ocean.

The seawater began to churn violently, as if stirred by an invisible hand from the bottom of an abyss. Layer upon layer of giant waves converged from all directions, rushing towards Azure Wave Island.

At first, the waves were only a few meters high, like the surface of a lake ruffled by the wind.

But in the blink of an eye, those waves coalesced into walls of water tens of meters high, their surfaces rippling with fine waves, within which a faint blue spiritual light flowed.

Then the walls of water continued to rise, a hundred meters, two hundred meters, three hundred meters—finally transforming into a hundred-meter-high giant wave that stretched across the sky, like a blue crystal wall towering between heaven and earth, refracting a myriad of rays of light under the sun.

The sky suddenly darkened.

It wasn't dark clouds obscuring the sun; rather, the colossal wave was so immense and towering that it blocked out most of the sunlight.

A massive shadow stretched across the sea, from the crest of the wave all the way to the island's coastline, shrouding half of Azure Wave Island in a greyish-blue gloom. A

heavy, misty vapor filled the air, carrying the cold, salty tang of the deep sea, as if the very breath of the entire Void Sea had been compressed into this area.

The island's inhabitants began to stir. Some cried out and retreated, their footsteps echoing frantically on the stone pavement;

others gripped their magical artifacts, their spiritual energy flickering in the crowd;

still others stared up at the approaching wave, their faces pale, their lips moving but no sound escaping.

Vendors hawking their wares at the docks dropped their goods, and children playing on the street were dragged indoors by their parents.

The cultivators who had been discussing amongst themselves now all stared back, mouths agape, like a row of statues frozen in time.

"What…what is that?!"

"A giant wave! A giant wave!"

"Impossible! The Void Sea never has waves this big! The surface of the Void Sea has remained unchanged for millennia; there's never been such an anomaly!"

"Look at the crest of the wave! There are people! There are people on the crest of the wave!"

Kai's pupils contracted slightly.

His gaze pierced through the spray and surging waves, through the crystalline curtain of water cascading like a waterfall, and he saw the crest of the hundred-meter-high wave.

Several figures stood on the crest, each radiating an aura as calm and powerful as the deep sea.

Leading them was a middle-aged man with a cold, stern face and a robust build. His skin was a deep indigo blue, like the deepest seawater reflecting the moonlight.

His long hair was silver-white, like white foam billowing in the deep sea currents, swirling like a waterfall in the gale.

A faint, shimmering light enveloped him, within which countless tiny ripples flowed and danced, forming a natural protective barrier.

He held no magical artifacts, yet the entire void sea seemed to respond to his breath.

Behind him stood five equally imposing aquatic cultivators, each with a solemn expression and piercing gaze.

Their skin displayed varying shades of blue, some like the turquoise of shallow waters, others the deep blue of the ocean.

They wore armor woven from sea silk, shimmering like fish scales in the sunlight. The crest of

a wave rested steadily beneath their feet, hovering about a hundred feet from the island's shore.

The hundred-meter-high wave, like their chariot, like a living being they had summoned, lifted them above the clouds, overlooking the entire Azure Wave Island and the tiny, ant-like inhabitants upon it.

The island's inhabitants erupted in uproar.

"Aquatic Clan! It's the Aquatic Clan!"

"So many Aquatic Clan cultivators! They've come to rescue us!"

"Run! If a fight breaks out, we'll be caught in the crossfire!"

"Why run! If they dare to attack, with so many cultivators on the island, what are we afraid of? The protective formation of Azure Wave Island isn't just for show!"

Discussions, exclamations, and frantic footsteps mingled together, plunging the entire dock area into unprecedented chaos.

Some ran wildly towards the island, some squeezed towards the dock trying to board the ship, while others stood still, clutching their magical artifacts, their expressions shifting between fear and excitement.

Kai stood still, looking up at the figure atop the hundred-meter-high wave, his purple eyes swirling with complex emotions.

He could sense the aura of those Aquatic Clan cultivators—the middle-aged man at the head was at least a second-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal. The fluctuations of the laws surrounding him were like a calm, deep sea, the surface placid, but the depths turbulent.

The five aquatic cultivators behind him were also around the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm. Each of them possessed a refined and profound aura, like ancient, solidified rocks.

This strength was enough to crush most cultivators on Azure Wave Island, and even the man in fine clothes would have to think twice.

The man in fine clothes remained standing on the high platform, his expression showing no sign of panic, but rather an air of long-awaited anticipation.

He stood up, walked to the edge of the platform, and his golden gaze pierced through the hundred-foot distance to meet the eyes of the middle-aged aquatic man on the crest of the wave.

A slight smile played on his lips, carrying a sense of nonchalant ease: “Finally here. I’ve been waiting for you for a long time.”

The leading middle-aged aquatic man’s gaze swept over the crowd and landed on the girl on the stone pillar.

A suppressed rage surfaced on his cold face, like a volcano that had been suppressed for too long at the bottom of the deep sea.

His voice was like a deep, dark current, deep and heavy: “Release my people.”

The man in fine clothes smiled: “Release her. Exchange her for a Sea Soul Pearl.”

“A Sea Soul Pearl? You dare to ask for that.”

The middle-aged man from the aquatic tribe’s voice grew even colder, each word carrying a sharp chill.

“One person for one Sea Soul Pearl, very fair.”

The man in fine clothes’ voice remained leisurely, even carrying a hint of a businessman’s shrewdness. “While your aquatic tribe’s Sea Soul Pearls are precious, a member’s life should be worth more than a pearl, right?

Let me do the math, one life for one pearl, no matter how you look at it, you’re making a profit.”

“The Sea Soul Pearl is a sacred object of the aquatic tribe, only one is formed every ten thousand years.”

A young aquatic cultivator behind the middle-aged man finally couldn’t help but speak, his voice filled with barely suppressed anger, “You’re asking for one right off the bat, that’s going too far! Do you know what a Sea Soul Pearl means to my aquatic tribe?”

“Too far?”

The richly dressed man chuckled softly, “If you don’t?” The girl on the stone pillar was extremely weak, her face ashen white, her breathing shallow and rapid, the rise and fall of her chest growing shallower and shallower.

Her gaze fell upon the middle-aged man atop the wave, her lips moving slightly as if she wanted to say something but no sound came out; only

the faint outline of three words could be seen in his mouth—"Don't agree..."

The middle-aged aquatic man, seeing the girl's condition, clenched his fists, his knuckles cracking, turning white as frost. His

long, silvery-white hair whipped violently in the sea breeze, like a flag torn by a storm.

He remained silent for a full ten breaths, each breath feeling like a knife cutting into his own flesh.

The five aquatic cultivators behind him also clenched their fists, dark red veins faintly visible beneath their indigo skin, like lava about to erupt.

"A Sea Soul Pearl," the middle-aged man squeezed out through clenched teeth. "I can give you a Sea Soul Pearl. But you must release her first."

The man in fine clothes shook his head: "Release the pearl first, then release her."

"You don't trust our aquatic race?"

"I just don't trust anyone." The man in fine clothes smiled, sat back down in his chair, and picked up his teacup. "The person will be released when the pearl arrives.

Until then, she'll stay here. Don't worry, I'll have someone feed her water; she won't die anytime soon."

The middle-aged man's gaze was fixed on the man in fine clothes, his deep-sea eyes churning with overwhelming rage, like a tsunami about to burst its banks.

But in the end, he did nothing.

He simply looked deeply at the man in fine clothes, then at the girl on the stone pillar, his voice carrying an extreme chill: "You will pay the price

for today's decision. I swear in the name of the aquatic race, this matter will not end here."

"I'll be waiting." The man in fine clothes still smiled.

The middle-aged aquatic man said nothing more.

His gaze swept across the island, lingering for a fleeting moment on Kai.

A barely perceptible ripple flickered in his deep-sea-like eyes, as if sensing something unusual.

His brow twitched slightly, but quickly returned to its usual calm.

Then he turned, his long, silvery-white hair whipping through the air in an arc, and rode away on the waves.

The hundred-meter-high waves receded slowly, dissipating into the void sea like the receding tide.

The surging water walls receded layer by layer, transforming into rolling waves, and the five aquatic cultivators followed closely behind, their figures disappearing beneath the deep blue sea.

The sea returned to calm, and sunlight once again bathed the island, as if everything that had just happened was merely an illusion.

The crowd on the island remained silent for a long time, then erupted into an even louder murmur of discussion.

"Gone? Just like that?!"

"Weren't the aquatic race supposed to be fierce? How could they just leave like that?"

"What do you know! The Sea Soul Pearl! That's the Sea Soul Pearl! The lifeblood of the aquatic race! They're going back to get the pearl to exchange for someone!"

“Who exactly is that richly dressed man? How dare he threaten the aquatic race like that?”

“The island lord of Azure Wave Island, don’t you know? His name is Shen Tianhai, a peak second-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal. He’s been operating in this Void Sea area for tens of thousands of years, and no one dares to offend him.”

Discussions, speculations, and exclamations spread like a tide through the crowd.

Some were relieved that a fight hadn’t broken out, some regretted missing the excitement, and some began to speculate on how this transaction would ultimately end.

Kai stood still, his purple eyes gazing at the now calm sea.

He had noticed the aquatic man’s glance at him before he left.

That fleeting fluctuation indicated that the man had indeed sensed the presence of the aquatic power within him.

Shen Tianhai looked at a servant beside him, who understood from a single glance.

With a wave of his hand, a crack suddenly appeared beneath the stone pillar where the girl was bound, and seawater poured in, instantly enveloping the aquatic girl.

Enveloped in seawater, the girl, who had been on the verge of death, began to recover rapidly.

Clearly, Kai had made preparations on Bibo Island long ago; capturing this aquatic girl was not an accident. These arrangements were obviously designed for the aquatic cultivators.

“Let’s go,” Kai said softly. “Let’s find a place to stay. This charade isn’t over yet.”

Kai led Xuan Zhenzi and Jiang Xuelan away, finding an inn to settle down temporarily.

…

Deep within the Void Sea, sunlight could no longer penetrate the hundreds of feet of water.

The surrounding seawater changed from azure to deep blue, then from deep blue to an almost inky dark blue. Only the occasional phosphorescent light filtering through the deep sea cracks, like stardust scattered in the darkness, illuminated the aquatic tribe's path back to their settlement.

The middle-aged aquatic man—Shui Wuhen—was the chosen leader of the twenty-first heaven aquatic tribe.

He walked at the head of the group, his long, silvery-white hair flowing gently in the water like a silent flag.

His pace was swift, each step creating ripples in the water, leaving the five aquatic cultivators behind him far behind.

His expression was unreadable, but his deep-sea eyes churned with suppressed emotions, like a volcano covered in ice.

The five aquatic cultivators followed silently, none speaking.

The humiliation they had suffered on Azure Wave Island was like an invisible thorn piercing their hearts.

They had watched helplessly as their clan's girl was bound to a stone pillar, her life hanging by a thread, suppressed by the laws of nature, yet they were powerless to act because of the threat from Chen Tianhai.

Even more humiliating was that not only had they failed to save her, but they had also been forced to agree to exchange her for the Sea Soul Pearl.

After passing through a natural archway formed by coral and reefs, the waters ahead suddenly widened.

A massive underwater city appeared before them—Deep Blue City, the aquatic settlement in the Void Sea.

The city's buildings, constructed of pure white coral stone and blue glazed tiles, cascaded down the gentle slopes of the underwater mountains, like pearls embedded in the deep sea.

Glowing seaweed and spiritual plants lined the streets, bathing the entire city in a soft, blue-green light.

Aquatic cultivators moved through the streets, some riding tamed sea beasts, some gathering spiritual materials among the reefs, and others practicing water magic in the plazas—everything appeared peaceful and orderly.

But when Shui Wuhen and his group entered the city, all eyes turned to them.

The news had clearly reached them—Lan Xi had been captured. Lan Xi was Shui Wuhen's niece, and a beloved young figure in Deep Blue City.

Although the aquatic race was isolated from the world, it was a small group, and everyone knew each other. The news of Lan Xi's capture by an outsider was like a boulder thrown into water, creating ripples across the land.

Shui Wuhen didn't linger, heading directly towards a large white hall in the city center.

That was the council hall of Deep Blue City, the place where the Water Clan discussed their affairs.

He pushed open the hall door and entered, followed by five cultivators who filed in.

The door closed behind them, shutting out outside views.

The interior of the council hall was even more spacious than the exterior, its walls inlaid with large and small luminous pearls, illuminating the entire hall as if it were daytime. In the center of the hall was a huge… “Sit.” He finally spoke, his voice low and calm, but the underlying tension was palpable to everyone.

The twelve aquatic elders took their seats around the stone table.

They were representatives of various factions within Deep Blue City and members of the council that Shui Wuhen consulted.

Each of them wore a solemn expression, clearly having already heard about the events on Azure Wave Island.

“You all know about Lan Xi’s matter.”

Shui Wuhen’s voice echoed in the empty hall. “Chen Tianhai wants a Sea Soul Pearl.”

An old aquatic cultivator with white hair frowned. “A Sea Soul Pearl? He’s gone mad! A Sea Soul Pearl is a sacred object, only one is formed every ten thousand years. He’s asking for one right off the bat; he’s threatening the very foundation of the aquatic race!”

“He wants to inflict pain on the aquatic race.”

Another middle-aged aquatic cultivator spoke, his voice hoarse. “That old fox, Chen Tianhai, has been operating in the Void Sea for tens of thousands of years. He knows the aquatic race’s weaknesses.

He knows we won’t abandon any of our people, and he knows what the Sea Soul Pearl means to us.

He doesn’t want the pearl; he wants the aquatic race’s submission.”

“Then we submit?” A young elder slammed his fist on the table and stood up abruptly. “Lan Xi is a child of our race! How old is she? She’s only seventeen! We can’t watch her die on the shore!”

“No one said they would abandon Lan Xi.”

Shui Wuhen’s voice remained calm, but a dark current surged in his deep, ocean-like eyes. “But the Sea Soul Pearl absolutely cannot be handed over.

Not because we can’t bear to part with it, but because Shen Tianhai will never keep his word. Even if

we hand over the pearl, he won’t release her. He wants more—once he’s tasted success, he’ll become even more ruthless.”

Silence fell over the hall.

Shui Wuhen was right.

They had seen through Shen Tianhai’s methods.

First, capture a member of the Water Clan and force them to hand over the Sea Soul Pearl.

If he succeeded this time, what about next time?

And the time after that?

He would keep capturing Water Clan members, keep extorting them, until he had squeezed every last drop of value from the Water Clan.

“Then what do we do?” the white-haired elder asked. “If we don’t hand over the pearl, Lan Xi will die on the shore. The suppression of the laws won’t stop because of negotiations. She won’t last more than a few days.”

“So we have to go and save her.” Shui Wuhen’s voice carried a calmness that came after finally making a decision. “Send someone to infiltrate Bibo Island and rescue Lan Xi.”

The hall was silent for a moment, then several elders spoke at the same time: “Infiltrate Bibo Island? Shen Tianhai is at the peak of the second rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal. There are also several experts at the second rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal on Bibo Island, and the island’s protective formation has been in place for tens of thousands of years. How can we infiltrate?”

“It’s precisely because everyone thinks it’s impossible that no one is on guard.”

Shui Wuhen’s gaze swept over everyone. “The array on Bibo Island protects the sky and the ground, but what about below the sea? Shen Tianhai has been cultivating for tens of thousands of years, but his foundation is on the island, not in the sea.

The aquatic race has lived in the Void Sea for tens of thousands of years, and no one is more familiar with the flow of water, the undercurrents, and the underwater rock structure than us.

As long as we can find an underground undercurrent passage leading to the center of the island, we can bypass his island-protecting array.

Moreover, in order to keep Lan Xi alive, they will definitely soak her in seawater, so we can definitely find a way to save Lan Xi from the sea.”

An elder in charge of exploring the surrounding waters pondered and said, “There is indeed an abandoned underground undercurrent passage near Bibo Island, leading to the central area of the island.

It is a fissure left by geological movements in ancient times, which was later mostly blocked by silt.

But Shen Tianhai should not know about the existence of this passage, because he is not an aquatic race and cannot be as familiar with the underwater terrain as we are."

"Is it passable?" Shui Wuhen asked.

"It needs clearing, but it's feasible," the elder nodded. "However, the entrance is in the reef area on the island's outer edge, requiring passage through a narrow underwater crevice."

"How many people should we send? Too many will only increase the risk of being spotted," another elder asked.

Shui Wuhen was silent for a moment, then looked up: "Send three. Peak first-grade Great Luo Golden Immortals, skilled in stealth and close combat. Infiltrate through the underwater current channel, bypass the island's protective formation, rescue Lan Xi, and return the same way."

"Where are my men?" A deep voice came from the direction of the palace door.

Everyone turned their heads simultaneously. The palace door had been pushed open a crack, and a young aquatic man stood in the doorway.

His skin was light blue, gleaming slightly under the light of the luminous pearl.

His face bore a striking resemblance to the girl on the stone pillar—the same deep blue eyes, the same high nose bridge, only his features were more rugged, possessing a sharpness honed by years of stealthy combat.

Lan Xi's brother, Lan Yuan.

A peak first-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal, the youngest elite warrior in Deep Blue City.

Shui Wuhen looked at him, unsurprised.

He had long guessed Lan Yuan would appear.

From the moment Lan Xi was captured, Lan Yuan couldn't possibly sit at home waiting for news.

"You should wait outside," Shui Wuhen said.

"I can't wait." Lan Yuan walked into the hall, his blue cloak billowing behind him. "My sister is suffering on the shore, and I'm just sitting here waiting? I can't wait.

Let me go. I know the underwater currents best; I've practiced stealth techniques in that reef area since I was a child."

"You know how dangerous this mission is," Shui Wuhen's voice was low. "Chen Tianhai is a peak second-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal. Once exposed, none of the three of you will return."

"I know," Lan Yuan said. "So I must go. If even your brother doesn't dare to rescue his sister, what right does the Water Clan have to say they won't abandon their people?"

Silence fell again in the hall.

Shui Wuhen looked at Lan Yuan for a long time, complex light surging in his deep sea-like eyes.

Finally, he slowly nodded.

"Alright. Lan Yuan will lead the team. You can choose the other two yourself."

Lan Yuan turned around, his gaze sweeping across the hall before settling on two young aquatic cultivators.

They were his childhood companions—Qian Hai and Shen Liu, all peak-level Great Luo Golden Immortals. The three had worked together for years, their teamwork as seamless as brothers.

“Qian Hai, Shen Liu, come with me.”

The two young men stood up and walked without hesitation behind Lan Yuan.

Their faces showed no fear, only a calm and resolute determination as they prepared to step onto the battlefield.

Shui Wuhen stood up, walked to Lan Yuan, and patted his shoulder: “Come back alive.”

Lan Yuan nodded: “Definitely.”

He turned and led Qianhai and Shenliu out of the hall.

The hall doors slowly closed behind them, shutting out the light of the luminous pearl from their backs.

Shui Wuhen stood before the stone table, staring at the closed door, silent for a long time.

The white-haired old man’s voice echoed in the empty hall: “Can they succeed?”

Shui Wuhen did not answer. He simply gazed in the direction of the hall doors, his deep-sea eyes surging with light like the ebb and flow of the tide.

“I don’t know,”

he finally spoke, “but I know one thing—if we don’t let them go, Lanxi will truly never return. And the dignity of the Water Clan will be utterly crushed in these repeated compromises.”

He withdrew his gaze, his voice carrying a heavy and resolute power like the undercurrents of the deep sea: “The dignity of the Water Clan does not need to be exchanged for the Sea Soul Pearl.”

Outside the hall, Lan Yuan and the other two had already crossed the city, heading towards the abandoned undercurrent passage. Bibo Island, the Island Lord's Mansion.

Shen Tianhai sat in his study, toying with a jade thumb ring that gleamed with a pale golden light. The ring was smooth and warm to the touch, its surface engraved with intricate seawater patterns.

It was carved from thousand-year-old sea-sinking jade, a trophy he had seized from an elder of the aquatic tribe years ago.

His gaze lingered through the carved window lattice, watching the sea gradually darken outside.

The afterglow of the setting sun spilled like molten gold onto the shimmering water, dyeing every wave a dazzling golden-red, yet it couldn't penetrate the sinister ruthlessness and scheming depths of his eyes.

A faint smile played on his lips, a smile like that of an old cat after a hearty meal, languid and satisfied, yet concealing a certainty that its prey was about to fall into its trap.

His fingertips caressed the patterns on the jade thumb ring; each touch felt like stroking a bargaining chip about to be won.

Lan Xi, the most outstanding young member of the aquatic tribe and Shui Wuhen's most beloved niece, was currently bound to a stone pillar in the central square of Bibo Island, becoming his best pawn in controlling the aquatic tribe.

If he could control this pawn, he could seize not just a single Sea Soul Pearl, but the entire Sea Soul Pearl mine.

A gentle knock sounded on the study door—three soft knocks, a steady rhythm, a unique signal from Mr. Liu.

Shen Tianhai didn't turn around, simply saying, "Come in."

The door hinges turned, creaking slightly, and an elderly man in a gray robe slowly entered.

The old man had a gaunt face, high cheekbones, and sunken cheeks, but his eyes were as sharp as a hawk's, seemingly able to pierce the heart. His aura was calm and restrained; his cultivation at the peak of the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm was as unfathomable as an abyss. He was none other than Mr. Liu, Shen Tianhai's most trusted strategist.

Having followed Shen Tianhai for 7,300 years, he had long since figured out the island lord's thoughts and knew the ruthlessness behind every scheme.

Mr. Liu walked to the desk, bowed slightly, and spoke respectfully yet calmly: "Island Lord, the aquatic tribe has returned, but there's been no news of them exchanging the Sea Soul Pearl for the people. Since they're not exchanging people, why not take action on the spot?"

Shen Tianhai gently placed the jade ring on the table, producing a crisp sound of jade clinking. He then picked up his teacup, lifted the lid, and wisps of steam rose, carrying the fragrance of Longjing tea.

He took a sip of hot tea, his voice carrying a confident composure, even a hint of mockery: "Of course they won't make a move.

That old water turtle, Shui Wuhen, has lived for tens of thousands of years, and is extremely indecisive and hesitant in his actions.

He's accompanied by five guards, seemingly formidable, but in reality, he's all bark and no bite.

He dares not start a war on Bibo Island, firstly for fear of harming the island's aquatic people and earning the reputation of disregarding the lives of his own kind;

secondly, for fear of escalating the situation beyond control and attracting the covetousness of other forces in the Void Sea, resulting in him losing more than he gains.

People bound by their own kind are the easiest to control."

Mr. Liu nodded, but his brows remained furrowed, his fingertips unconsciously rubbing the creases of his sleeve, clearly harboring concerns: "Island Lord is wise, I admire him. But I have a worry that I cannot keep quiet."

"Speak."

Shen Tianhai put down his teacup, leaned back in his chair, crossed his hands in front of his lower abdomen, his expression calm, having already anticipated Mr. Liu's question.

"Although the aquatic tribes will not wage war directly, they will never give up easily."

Mr. Liu's voice lowered slightly, his gaze falling on the topographical map of Bibo Island spread out on the floor.

The map was made of animal hide, its edges already yellowed, and marked with vermilion ink the island's topography, the nodes of the island's protective formation, and the distribution of underwater reefs, each mark clearly visible.

He pointed to the dense reef area on the island's outskirts, his fingertip landing on a black mark. "Island Lord, you see, the underwater topography around Azure Wave Island is extremely complex.

It's crisscrossed by undercurrents and riddled with caves, especially this black reef area, where underwater fissures abound. Even our island's sentries dare not venture too far.

I suspect the aquatic tribes might possess an underwater passage leading to the island's interior, since this area is their territory.

Their understanding of underwater topography far surpasses ours.

If they were to infiltrate underwater, bypass the island's protective array, and sneak towards the plaza to rescue Lan Xi... the consequences would be unimaginable."

Upon hearing this, Shen Tianhai's smile deepened rather than faded, a golden glint flashing in his eyes, revealing a shrewd and calculating smugness.

He stood up, walked slowly to the window, stood with his hands behind his back, his wide robes swaying gently behind him. The afterglow of the setting sun shone on him, but it only made his aura appear more sinister. "Mr. Liu, how many years have you followed me?"

Mr. Liu was slightly taken aback, then bowed and replied, "I have followed the Island Lord for seven thousand three hundred and twenty-seven days."

"Seven thousand three hundred and twenty-seven days,"

Shen Tianhai repeated, his tone carrying a hint of emotion and a touch of sarcasm. "You've followed me for so long, accompanying me from a minor island lord to where I now control Bibo Island and intimidate the surrounding seas. Don't you understand me?

When have I, Shen Tianhai, ever left such an obvious loophole in my actions?

Since I dared to tie Lan Xi up in the square, I had already calculated all the aquatic tribes' escape routes."

Mr. Liu's eyes brightened slightly, his doubts dissipating somewhat, but a hint of confusion remained: "The Island Lord means... you were prepared?"

"Of course."

Shen Tianhai turned around, walked to the desk, and lightly tapped the plaza on the map with his fingertip. “Why do you think I tied Lan Xi to the plaza?

Why do you think I opened the seawater beneath her, using an array to support that body of water, seemingly to prolong her life and prevent her from dying from being separated from the water and suppressed by the laws of the heavens?

Mr. Liu, that wasn’t life-prolonging water at all; it was a net, a net specifically prepared for the aquatic creatures.”

He pointed to the plaza outside the window, his gaze sharp as a knife, as if it could pierce through layers of buildings. To the stone pillar where Lan Xi was bound: “I have already laid seventeen restrictive traps in the waters beneath Lan Xi, each meticulously designed and interlocking.

These restrictions are all woven from deep-sea black iron and aquatic runes, the same material as the net used to capture her. They perfectly absorb the aquatic spiritual energy, making it impossible for aquatic cultivators to move an inch within them.

The first one is a trapping array. As soon as aquatic people approach from underwater, attempting to get close to that area, the array will immediately trigger, forming a water-blue barrier that traps them within;

is the first trapping array enough?” Mr. Liu’s face showed admiration, and he bowed, saying, “The Island Lord is wise and thoughtful; I am ashamed of my inferiority.”

“Not only that,”

Shen Tianhai continued, his tone carrying an almost leisurely confidence, as if everything was under his control, “I have also set up three hidden sentries three hundred feet below that body of water.

Each sentry is guarded by a cultivator of the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal. They wear specially made water-breathing robes, which can perfectly conceal their aura and listen for any movement underwater at all times.

Even the slightest ripple in the water will not escape their perception. As long as there is any abnormality, they will immediately report it through the communication jade talisman, and the message will reach me within an incense stick's time."

He sat back down in his chair, picked up his teacup, and took a sip of the slightly cooled tea, completely unaware of it. His eyes churned with calculations like a deep-sea whirlpool: "If the aquatic people dare to come, that's perfect.

One Lan Xi is not enough of a bargaining chip, then add two more..." What about one, three, or four?

The aquatic tribe values its members most; their weakness lies in the lives of their own kind. The more people we have under our control, the less likely they are to act rashly.

Once we have ten of their members in our hands, let alone a single Sea Soul Pearl, even if I demand they hand over the entire Sea Soul Pearl mine and control of the underwater reef area, they will obediently agree.

This is the key: by grasping the opponent's weakness, we can control the entire situation."

Mr. Liu pondered for a moment, his brows furrowing slightly again, still not completely at ease: "Island Lord, you are wise; I have learned much.

But what if the aquatic tribe sends someone extremely powerful, such as Shui Wuhen personally taking action, or sending a second-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal to forcibly break through the restrictions?

With the power of those seventeen restrictions, I'm afraid it will be difficult to trap such an expert."

Shen Tianhai smiled, his laughter carrying a hint of disdain. With a hint of confidence, he said, “That’s another trap. Do you think I’m the only expert on the island?

Do you think I keep those elders around for nothing?

The three Grand Luo Golden Immortals of the second rank on the island usually cultivate behind closed doors, seemingly indifferent to worldly affairs, but in reality, they are all assassins I personally trained. As long as I give the order, they will act immediately.

As long as the aquatic people trigger the restriction, the three elders will arrive at the scene within an incense stick’s time. With the three of them working together, they have a 99% chance of capturing the intruder alive.

Even if Shui Wuhen comes in person, he won’t gain any advantage.”

He put down his teacup, a cold glint flashing in his golden eyes, and said solemnly, “Mr. Liu, remember one thing.

In this dog-eat-dog world, the one who truly controls the situation is never the strongest, but the one who is best prepared.” “Shui Wuhen’s strength is higher than mine .

We are both at the peak of the second rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal, but he is half a rank higher than me. However, he is restrained by his clansmen at every turn, unable to act freely, and bound by so-called kinship.

As for me, I have no weaknesses. I can use any means necessary to achieve my goals. Therefore, from the very beginning, I have won this game.”

Mr. Liu bowed deeply, his tone full of awe: “Your subordinate has learned a great deal. The island lord is farsighted, and your subordinate is ashamed of his inferiority.”

Shen Tianhai waved his hand, his tone indifferent: “Go. Go tell the sentries to be on high alert. Tonight’s night is perfect for ‘entertaining guests.’

Also, have the three elders prepare to be on standby at any time. As soon as the restriction is triggered, they must act immediately and capture the infiltrators alive. Don’t kill them easily; they are valuable if they are left alive.”

“Yes, I will take care of it immediately.”

Mr. Liu bowed and replied, turning and leaving the study. The door closed gently behind him, shutting out the candlelight inside and the night outside.

Shen Tianhai sat alone in the study, watching the sky outside the window grow darker and darker. The afterglow of the setting sun gradually faded, replaced by the cold moonlight.

He picked up his teacup and drank the slightly cool tea in one gulp. The tea entered his stomach, but it could not extinguish the ambition and calculation in his heart.

His gaze passed through the study window, through the gradually darkening street, through the sparse pedestrians, and landed on the faint outline of the stone pillar in the direction of the square, his eyes growing increasingly sinister.

“The Water Tribe…”

he murmured to himself, his voice carrying a gentle warmth, like the sharpening of a knife, yet concealing a chilling intent. “However many you bring, I’ll capture them all. I want to see how many of your people you can exchange for, how much confidence you have to contend with my Shen Tianhai.”

Night deepened, and the surface of the Void Sea shimmered with a fine silver light under the moonlight, like a tapestry of shattered silver, or

countless silver fireflies flickering with the gently rising and falling waves.

Below the surface, in the dark depths, the water pressure increased, and the light grew dimmer, with only the occasional flash of fluorescent seaweed providing a faint glimmer.

Three figures moved slowly along the seabed rocks, their movements so light they barely disturbed the surrounding currents, like three shadows blending into the deep sea, silent yet carrying an aura of resolute determination.

Lan Yuan swam at the forefront. He was the cream of the crop among the younger generation of the aquatic tribe, his cultivation having reached the peak of the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm. His stealth techniques were masterful, and he was even more adept at underwater maneuvers.

His blue cloak had long since been stored away in his storage ring, leaving him only clad in a suit of deep blue water scale armor that clung to his skin.

The armor plates were crafted from the scales of deep-sea blue-scaled fish, reflecting a faint light in the dim water. They were as fine and smooth as fish scales, providing both defense against attacks and reducing water resistance, while also concealing his presence.

Close behind him were Qian Hai and Shen Liu, both elite members of the aquatic tribe, their cultivation also at the peak of the first rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm.

The three advanced in a wedge formation, maintaining a distance of three zhang between each other, allowing them to support each other

without being detected simultaneously due to being too close together. This was a stealth formation passed down through the aquatic tribe for thousands of years, specifically used for infiltrating enemy territory.

The three had grown up together since childhood, and were extremely familiar with each other and shared a deep understanding.

The seabed beneath their feet gradually became more complex, the once flat, sandy seabed replaced by jagged reefs.

These reefs, like the skeletons of ancient behemoths, stood silently in the darkness, their surfaces covered with thick layers of seaweed and barnacles. The tentacle-like seaweed swayed gently in the current, like ghostly strands of hair.

The gaps between the reefs were narrow and winding, in some places only wide enough for one person to pass sideways. A slight misstep could result in being cut by the sharp rocks, or even triggering hidden traps.

Lan Yuan stopped behind a massive reef, about two people high, and raised his hand to gesture for silence, signaling the two behind him to stop.

He pressed himself against the surface of the reef, closed his eyes, and unleashed all his senses, extending them forward in the direction of the current, carefully sensing the changes in the water flow, the temperature gradient, and the fluctuations in spiritual energy ahead A moment later, Lan Yuan opened his eyes, a hint of solemnity, yet also a touch of certainty, flashing in his deep blue, ocean-like eyes.

His voice was extremely low, carried through the water to Shallow Sea and Deep Current, avoiding any sound that might reveal their location: “We’ve arrived.

There’s a very slight temperature gradient in the water not far ahead, half a degree warmer than the surrounding seawater. This is a unique temperature difference between artificially created spaces and natural waters, indicating a man-made passage nearby.

The entrance to the rift is beneath that black reef ahead. Its surface is smooth, without any seaweed or barnacles, making it distinctly different from the surrounding reefs and easily identifiable.”

Shallow Sea and Deep Current nodded simultaneously, a flicker of excitement in their eyes, yet they remained calm and silent.

The three adjusted their breathing, suppressing their auras to the extreme, and continued moving forward silently.

After navigating several large reefs and avoiding several turbulent undercurrents, they indeed saw a completely black reef.

The reef was about ten feet high, its surface smooth as a mirror, as if meticulously polished, standing out starkly in the dark seawater.

Below the reef was a narrow crevice, about the width of a person, extending downwards, its depth obscured by darkness.

A faint, warm current emanated from the crevice, carrying an aura different from the seawater—the spiritual energy emanating from the activated array.

“This is it,”

Lan Yuan’s voice came again, tinged with barely perceptible excitement. “The crevice leads to the underground waters at the center of the island. Everyone, get ready, adjust your breathing, follow me, don’t fall behind, and remember, don’t make a sound.”

Shallow Sea and Deep Current nodded simultaneously, taking a deep breath to steady their internal energy.

Lan Yuan was the first to enter the crevice. The narrow passage was only wide enough for one person to pass through, with rough rock walls on either side.

The rocks were cold and damp to the touch, riddled with tiny holes, from which small fragments of sand occasionally fell, striking the water scales with extremely faint sounds.

Lan Yuan slowed his pace, pressing his body against the rock wall, letting the current carry him forward to minimize exertion. Simultaneously, he used his senses to probe the terrain ahead, wary of potential traps.

He could feel thick layers of rock above him—the foundation of Azure Wave Island, the boundary of the island's protective array.

This array covered the entire island from above and all sides, possessing immense power, capable of withstanding attacks from a second-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal, but it overlooked this deep underwater fissure.

The underwater terrain was too complex, with crisscrossing currents; even the mighty Sunken Sea couldn't completely seal off the island's foundation, which was key to the aquatic creatures finding this passage.

The fissure narrowed, in some places requiring him to turn sideways or bend over to pass. Lan Yuan felt his water scales scraping against the rock wall, producing an extremely faint scraping sound.

Each scrape made his heart leap into his throat, fearing the subtle sound would be detected by the sentries.

He held his breath, moving forward with minimal effort, his muscles tense, his eyes scanning the area ahead warily. Shallow Sea and Deep Current followed suit, staying close behind without the slightest lapse in concentration.

After crawling for about half an hour, the current in the passage suddenly became rapid, carrying fine sand and mud from ahead. The water

stung their faces slightly, and the pressure suddenly increased, like an invisible hand squeezing their bodies.

Lan Yuan knew they had reached the most dangerous section. He gestured for the two behind him to stay close, moving quickly forward with the swift current.

Shallow Sea and Deep Current followed closely, holding their breath and letting the current carry them forward. Their bodies swayed violently in the rushing water, yet they maintained their formation, not separating.

With precise control over the current, Lan Yuan carefully avoided the sharp protrusions on the rock face, guiding the water's direction, leading Shallow Sea and Deep Current through this turbulent area with difficulty.

When the three finally broke free of the turbulent water and the passage ahead suddenly widened, they couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief, yet still dared not breathe deeply, quickly adjusting their internal energy.

Lan Yuan poked his head out of the crevice, cautiously observing the surrounding environment. Only after confirming there was no danger did he slowly breathe in the underwater air. Although it carried a slightly murky scent, it eased his tense nerves slightly.

Before them appeared a wide underground waterway, the water level about three zhang below the rock wall above. On both sides were man-made stone walls, their surfaces covered with water stains and moss, damp and somewhat slippery.

The water's surface was as calm as a mirror, reflecting the faint light coming from afar. The light was pale blue, likely emanating from some kind of water-attribute mineral.

"We're out,"

Lan Yuan said softly, his voice echoing briefly in the enclosed underground space before being swallowed by the water. "This should be a natural cave beneath Bibo Island.

It was transformed by Chentianhai into a water storage facility. The seawater beneath Lan Xi must have been drawn from here."

The three swam out of the crevice, surfaced, and quickly surveyed their surroundings.

A stone staircase ran along one side of the cave, paved with bluestone slabs covered in moss, making it slippery and difficult to traverse. The staircase led to a tightly closed iron gate higher up. The gate was about two zhang high and a chi thick, appearing extremely sturdy.

Coarse runes were engraved on the gate, emitting a faint blue light and radiating water-attribute spiritual energy fluctuations—runes unique to the aquatic race, used to maintain the circulation and flow of seawater. It seemed this was the source of the seawater used to sustain Lan Xi's life.

Lan Yuan's gaze fell on the iron gate, and following its direction, combined with the topographical map in his memory, he imagined the location of the plaza on the ground.

Based on the terrain, the stone pillar where Lan Xi was bound was about ten zhang directly above this door.

The seawater enveloping her was drawn up from this underground water area using some kind of formation, and the node of the formation should be behind the iron gate.

"Qianhai, you stay here to provide backup,"

Lan Yuan's tone became serious, his gaze falling on Qianhai. "Shenliu and I will go up, infiltrate the plaza, and rescue Lan Xi.

If we don't return within half an hour, it means we've already…?" Qian Hai's expression changed slightly, a hint of worry flashing in his eyes. He wanted to refuse, but knew this wasn't the time to act rashly.

He was the weakest of the three, so staying behind to provide backup was the best option.

He gritted his teeth, nodded, and said firmly, "Alright, be careful. I'll wait for you here. Half an hour.

If you encounter danger, I'll find a way to distract the enemy and buy you time."

Lan Yuan nodded, saying nothing more. He took a deep breath, leaped from the water, his body tracing a graceful arc in the air before landing steadily on the stone steps.

His steps were extremely light, like a feline, making almost no sound as he quickly climbed the damp stone steps.

The water scales rubbed against the bluestone, producing a barely audible sound, which he cleverly masked with his spiritual power.

Shen Liu followed closely behind, his water scales moving swiftly and quietly in the darkness like a silent snake, his eyes scanning the surroundings warily, ready to deal with any unexpected situation.

The runes on the iron gate suddenly lit up as they approached, a faint blue light flashing for a moment before quickly fading.

Lan Yuan was startled and immediately stopped, holding his breath and cautiously observing his surroundings. He only relaxed when he was certain there was no movement.

He carefully examined the runes on the iron gate and understood: these runes were only used to maintain the circulation of seawater; there were no additional restrictions or

warning functions. Shen Tianhai probably hadn't expected anyone to infiltrate from underwater and come here.

Lan Yuan tentatively pushed the gate; the iron gate emitted a low creak, not loud, but particularly jarring in the quiet underground space.

Lan Yuan's heart tightened. He immediately enveloped the iron gate with his spiritual power, blocking the sound, and then slowly pushed it open, revealing a narrow crack.

He squeezed through the crack, quickly scanning the environment behind the door. After confirming there was no danger, he signaled Shen Liu to follow.

Behind the door was a narrow passage, about ten feet wide and twenty feet high, sloping upwards at an angle of about thirty degrees.

Every few steps along the walls on either side of the passage were embedded pieces of pale blue ore, emitting a faint, cold light that illuminated the passage like the pre-dawn sky—dim, yet enough to see the path clearly.

The walls were covered in water stains and moss, making them slippery and difficult to walk on. Small pebbles were scattered on the floor, making a slight sound when stepped on.

Lan Yuan squeezed through the crack in the door and walked upwards along the passage, his steps extremely light, each step landing on a pebble-free spot to minimize the noise.

Shen Liu followed closely behind him, the two moving quickly through the dim passage, their breathing barely audible, only the soft sound of their footsteps echoing in the passage.

After about thirty steps, another door appeared at the end of the passage, this time not an iron door, but a heavy stone door.

The stone gate, carved from a single piece of bluestone, was approximately two zhang (about 6.6 meters) high and one chi and five cun (about 1.5 feet) thick. Its surface was covered with densely packed runes, which emitted a faint blue light and exuded a powerful aura of restriction.

Lan Yuan’s pupils contracted slightly, his steps halted abruptly, and his expression turned grave.

He recognized those runes; they were unique to the aquatic race, sealing runes specifically designed to restrict the flow of their spiritual energy. Their power was immense; even a first-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal would find them difficult to break.

Only the core elders of the aquatic race could craft such runes. How could Shen Tianhai, a human cultivator, possess such restrictive runes?

“Be careful,”

Lan Yuan whispered, his voice heavy with a hint of fear. “There’s something strange about this door. The runes on it are the restrictive runes of the Water Clan, specifically designed to counter us Water Clan cultivators. How could Shen Tianhai have mastered such runes?

It seems he’s been researching our Water Clan for quite some time now, and his capture of Lan Xi wasn’t a spur-of-the-moment decision, but rather a long-planned scheme.”

Shen Liu leaned closer, his gaze sweeping over the runes. Lan Yuan’s face darkened, his eyes filled with shock and confusion: “These are… the Water Clan’s spirit-sealing runes!

Only the clan’s Grand Elder can refine them. How could Shen Tianhai, a human, have learned them? Could there be a traitor within the clan?”

“Very likely.”

Lan Yuan’s voice deepened, a cold glint flashing in his eyes. “Regardless of whether there’s a traitor or not, now is not the time to pursue that. We must break the seal on the door as soon as possible and rescue Lan Xi. She won’t last much longer.”

He reached out, his fingertips lightly touching the runes on the stone door’s surface. A cool sensation spread through his fingertips, and the runes glowed slightly before dimming again.

Lan Yuan could sense the power contained within the runes.

Pure aquatic power, but its original flow had been distorted by some technique, transforming it into a power with binding properties.

This technique was extremely subtle, even more bizarre than the runes crafted by the aquatic elder. If Lan Yuan hadn't cultivated aquatic techniques since childhood and was intimately familiar with aquatic runes, he would have been almost completely oblivious to its workings.

"Can it be broken?" Shen Liu asked, his tone tinged with urgency and worry.

Lan Yuan remained silent for a moment, his fingertips gently caressing the runes, carefully observing their patterns and the flow of spiritual energy. He quickly calculated a way to break the spell: "Yes. But it will take time.

These runes have their flow distorted, making them extremely difficult to break. We need to correct the flow of spiritual energy bit by bit, without the slightest mistake, otherwise the restriction will be triggered, issuing a warning.

And once it's broken, the person who set up the formation will know someone has broken in. We must act quickly."

"Then what do we do? Time is running out, and Lan Xi's condition is deteriorating." Shen Liu's voice carried a hint of anxiety, his eyes filled with worry. He could imagine how painful it must be for Lan Xi, bound to the stone pillar and subjected to the suppression of the celestial laws.

Lan Yuan gritted his teeth, a resolute glint in his eyes: "Break it! We don't have time to take a detour, we have to bite the bullet and go for it.

Shen Liu, you protect me. If there's any movement, tell me immediately, and I'll try to break the seal within an incense stick's time."

"Okay!"

Shen Liu nodded immediately, turning to stand at the entrance of the passage, vigilantly watching both ends. His spiritual energy quietly circulated, ready for battle. He would act immediately at the slightest sign of trouble to buy time for Lan Yuan.

Lan Yuan took a deep breath, placing his hands on the surface of the stone door. Blue light surged from his palms, slowly seeping into the runes.

His power was of the same origin as the runes, both being aquatic power. He carefully avoided the distorted parts, correcting the original flow bit by bit.

This was an extremely meticulous task, like untangling knots in a river.